

## 6 Assessment of Proficiency in the Language Arts

*Taken together [the three purposes of assessment] provide a road map to achieving the standards: the starting place, the routes to take, the points at which to change routes, and the destination.*

Ideally, assessment and instruction are linked inextricably within any curriculum. The key to using assessment effectively and efficiently in a program of instruction is to recognize above all that different types of assessment tools must be used for different purposes. The following assessments are crucial to achieving the *English-Language Arts Content Standards*:

- *Entry-level assessment*: Do students possess crucial prerequisite skills and knowledge expected at their grade level? Do they already know some of the material to be taught?
- *Monitoring of progress*: Are students progressing adequately toward achieving the standards? Do they need reteaching? Is emphasis on specific instructional components needed in the next series of lessons or units?
- *Summative assessment*: Have students achieved the goals defined by a given standard or group of standards?

Although many other purposes exist for assessment, the three just listed are critical to this framework because they inform instruction. Taken together, they provide a road map to achieving the standards: the starting place, the routes to take, the points at which to change routes, and the destination. Assessment to inform instruction does not,

however, address other purposes of assessment, such as supplying diagnostic information to help determine the appropriate instructional level for entry into and exit from an intensive intervention program. The discussion in this chapter also summarizes California's statewide assessment system, including the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, the *California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)*, and the *California English Language Development Test (CELDT)*.

Teachers may have apprehensions about assessment. Some may even be convinced that successful monitoring of progress toward achieving the standards requires a large amount of testing; however, if language arts programs and textbooks fully integrate assessment and instruction, effective assessment activities—especially the monitoring of progress—will contribute to learning and may make instructional time more effective (Howell and Nolet 2000).

### Characteristics of Assessment Across Grade Levels

No single measure or method of assessment can provide the scope of information needed to achieve all three purposes listed previously. Except for contributing to informing instruction, the three types of assessment do not apply equally across all grade levels. The content and specific skills and strategies, more discrete in the early grades, become progressively more complex and intertwined in the advanced grades. In the sections that follow, the differences in emphasis that assessment should accommodate are described for the three grade-level clusters: kindergarten through grade three, grades four through eight, and grades nine through twelve. In addition, examples of what and when to assess are indicated for kindergarten through grade three and

grades four through eight. These examples are based on the *English-Language Arts Content Standards*.

## Assessment in Kindergarten Through Grade Three

### Entry-Level Assessment

These assessments are used to determine the proficiency of individual students or groups of students according to a specific standard or prerequisite skill or knowledge. This determination informs the teacher what needs to be included in upcoming lessons or in preteaching or reteaching lessons. In some instances these more discrete assessments will help the teacher locate the level of the instructional program the students should enter. Often, instructional programs have assessments developed for this particular purpose to ensure proper student placement in the program. Entry-level assessment results should not prevent a student from participating in grade-level instruction. Instead, teachers should use the information gained from entry-level assessments to offer, if necessary, focused instruction in identified areas while including all students in grade-level instruction.

### Monitoring of Progress

These assessments focus on the general skills and knowledge students are to acquire according to the standards. Through tests developed by publishers, teachers, or districts and arranged as periodic assessments for all students, the domains and strands of the standards are assessed at the end of each major set of lessons (every six to eight weeks) to ensure all students are progressing as expected and to provide feedback on the effectiveness of instruction. The tests, which are curriculum embedded

and aligned to instruction, should be administered and scored frequently by the teacher. The results should be analyzed for each student and classroom on the basis of established levels that identify (1) who is at mastery; (2) what percent of students are at mastery; and, (3) which students need additional instructional support and in what area. The results should influence how teachers modify or emphasize parts of the curriculum and when differentiation of instruction is necessary.

## **Summative Assessment**

These assessments include quarterly, midyear, and end-of-the-year tests developed by the publisher and the school district. They are used to determine whether the student has mastered the content and to document long-term growth. The state-required assessments, such as the STAR *California Standards Tests*, also function as summative assessments for grades two through eleven. Year-end or semester-end outcomes should be the focus of summative assessment. For instance, blending words enables the long-term outcome of decoding words accurately and in turn enables fluency and meaningful reading comprehension. Similarly, kindergarten students should be assessed on phonemic awareness.

## **Examples of What and When to Assess, Kindergarten Through Grade Three**

Because of the large number of skills and strategies students are to acquire in each grade, a critical decision has to be made to determine what knowledge to assess and when. In the early grades, key indicators or predictors can be used to identify students making adequate progress toward literacy standards and those likely to have continued difficulty in learning to read. Those key indicators are derived largely from research on

students who learn to read easily in comparison with those who do not. Knowledge of letter names, phonemic segmentation, the reading of nonsense words, and fluency in oral reading are examples of the predictors or key indicators (Good, Simmons, and Smith 1998). Several commercial measures are available to provide reliable information about students' ability to recognize letters and to segment words into phonemes. It is recommended that teachers examine the available information on the reliability and validity of an assessment device prior to implementation. When used in timed conditions, the measures can also be reliably used to assess students' rate of progress over time. The research has clearly demonstrated the importance of students knowing certain skills (e.g., phoneme segmentation, knowledge of letter sounds) so proficiently that they have developed these skills to a level of fluency (Good, Simmons, and Kame'enui 2001). Standardized and validated measures that have a timed component can assist teachers in identifying students who have not developed critical skills to a level of fluency. The purpose of the measures is to identify students who need additional instruction and assess the effectiveness of instruction over time to be more responsive to student learning.

An important caveat is that some of the measures are indicators or predictors of reading difficulty but do not translate directly into instructional objectives. For example, although the ability to name letters is highly correlated with later reading achievement (Adams 1990), that ability should not be the exclusive focus of instruction (National Reading Panel 2000; National Research Council 1998). It is important to distinguish between assessment that (1) identifies children as at risk of reading difficulty and (2) informs instruction directly. For example, although the ability to read nonsense words is

a strong predictor for students who will learn to read easily, teaching the reading of nonsense words as part of the first-grade curriculum is not recommended. We may use the information gained from assessments using nonsense words may be a tool to identify students needing additional instruction in the alphabetic principle; however, instructional time is spent on teaching the instructional objective of building fluency in letter-sound knowledge, which will lead to better reading skills, not to the assessment device used to determine progress (Kame'enui, Good, and Harn 2003). Knowledge of letter-sound correspondences and ability to blend those sounds into words are assessed by measuring the student's ability to read nonsense words and are stringent indicators of students' acquisition and application of letter sounds and ability to blend sounds (Ehri 2002; National Reading Panel 2000).

The table on the following page offers suggestions for some of the important measures available to teachers to inform them of the effectiveness of the delivery of the instructional program and the progress of their students toward mastery of the standards. The assessments on the Progress-Monitoring Assessment Schedule are administered at the end of units/themes and assess what has been taught in the unit/theme or in previous units/themes.

**Progress-Monitoring Assessment Schedule for**  
**Kindergarten through Grade Three**

Skill	Indicator	Grade			
		K	One	Two	Three
Phoneme awareness	Produce rhyming words Count syllables Distinguish/match initial, final, and medial sounds Blend phonemes into words	Spring (initial and final sounds)	Fall/winter (initial, final, and medial sounds- diagnostic only)	Diagnostic Only	Diagnostic Only
Phoneme deletion and substitution	Initial sounds Final sounds First sound of a consonant blend Embedded sound of a consonant blend	Fall/winter /spring	Fall/winter (Diagnostic Only)	Diagnostic Only	Diagnostic Only
Phoneme segmentation	Segment sounds Count phonemes	Fall/winter /spring	Fall/winter (Diagnostic Only)	Diagnostic Only	Diagnostic Only
Beginning phonics	Name upper and lower case letters Consonant and short vowel sounds	Fall/winter /spring	Fall (Diagnostic Only)	Diagnostic Only	Diagnostic Only
Phonics and Word Reading	Decoding Sound spelling correspondences High-frequency words Syllabication	Fall/winter /spring	Every 4–6 weeks until mastery	Every 4–6 weeks until mastery	Every 4-6 weeks until mastery
Oral reading (fluency)	Words correct per minute on grade-level text		Optional in first 18 weeks, then every 6-8 weeks	6 times per year	6 times per year
Reading comprehension	Main idea and details Author's point of view and purpose Sequence Classification and categorization Inference Analysis (compare and contrast, cause and effect)		Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6–8 weeks	Every 6–8 weeks

Vocabulary	Antonyms Synonyms Multiple meanings Context meanings		Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6–8 weeks	Every 6–8 weeks
Spelling	Orthographic rules Regular/irregular words Morphemes Single and multisyllabic words		Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6–8 weeks	Every 6–8 weeks
Usage/ Conventions	Sentence structure Punctuation Capitalization Grammar Penmanship		Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6–8 weeks	Every 6–8 weeks
Writing	Organization/focus Single paragraph Topic sentence Facts/details Narratives (fictional and autobiographical) Expository descriptions Friendly letter Formal letter		Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks

## Assessment in Grades Four Through Eight

### Entry-Level Assessment

In these grades, the quantity and variety of prerequisite knowledge reach a point at which it is impractical to pretest for more than the most essential prior knowledge and skills. Gradually, the emphasis changes to evaluating the extent to which students already have knowledge of planned content and the need students may have for instructional support.

### Monitoring of Progress

Regularly scheduled testing of progress is still appropriate, especially in fourth through sixth grades. In addition, many forms of informal progress testing are also



appropriate, useful, and relatively easy to use. Written products, both draft and final, and oral presentations students do as a part of their class assignments should be scored and used to determine progress toward mastery of standards.

### Summative Assessment

These assessments include quarterly, midyear, and end-of-the-year tests developed by the publisher and the school district. They are used to determine whether the student has mastered the content and to document academic growth. The state-required assessments, including the STAR *California Standards Tests*, also function as summative assessments for grades four through eight. Long-term outcomes should be the focus of summative assessment. Consequently, in the areas of listening and speaking and of writing applications not covered by the STAR assessments, the school district or school may need to establish summative assessment for each genre of writing and speaking at each grade level that can be scored by teachers using district rubrics.

### Examples of What and When to Assess, Grades Four Through Eight

Assessment of skill development is much less specific in grades four through eight; however, many of the assessment areas from earlier grades apply at this level. Fluency in oral reading is a reliable indicator for students in grades four through six and for middle school students whose oral reading fluency is two or more years below grade level (Allinder, Fuchs, and Fuchs 2004; Kame'enui, Good, and Harn 2003; Shinn 1989). Assessments should be conducted to assist in determining the next steps for instruction, plans for interventions, and monitoring of response to instructional supports as necessary.

The table on the following page offers suggestions for some of the important measures available to teachers to inform them of their effectiveness in the delivery of the instructional program and the progress of their students toward mastery of the standards. The assessments in the Progress-Monitoring Assessment Schedule are administered at the end of units/themes and assess what has been taught in the unit/theme or in previous units/themes.

### Progress-Monitoring Assessment Schedule for Grades Four through Eight

Skill	Indicator	Grade				
		Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight
Oral reading (fluency)	Words correct per minute on grade-level text	3–4 times per year	2–3 times per year	1–2 times per year	Diagnostic Only	Diagnostic Only
Reading comprehension	Main idea and details Author's point of view and purpose Sequence Classification and categorization Inference Analysis (compare and contrast, cause and effect) Critique/criticism Literary response and analysis	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks
Vocabulary	Multiple meanings Synonyms and antonyms Word origins and root word (Angelo Saxon, Latin, Greek) Context meanings and shades of meanings Metaphors, similes, analogies, idioms Academic vocabulary	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks
Spelling	Orthographic rules Multisyllabic words Morphemes	Every 6-8	Every 6-8	Every 6-8	Every 6-8	Every 6-8

		weeks	weeks	weeks	weeks	weeks
Usage/ Conventions	Sentence structure Punctuation Capitalization Grammar	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks
Writing	Narratives Responses to literature Expository/information compositions Persuasive letters and compositions Summaries of readings Documents (business and technical)	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks	Every 6-8 weeks

## Assessment in Grades Nine Through Twelve

### Entry-Level Assessment

Teachers need to attend closely to student performance in the early weeks of the school year to determine student strengths and weaknesses relative to the *English-Language Arts Content Standards*. Entering ninth graders and new students should be assessed with a variety of measures, including criterion-referenced or norm-referenced standardized tests, which may be used to determine entry-level skills. General areas needing consideration are oral reading fluency and comprehension skills. Some students may require more extensive assessment of strengths and weaknesses, including the use of specialized testing.

### Monitoring of Progress

Tests for monitoring progress, as described for grades four through eight, are most appropriate throughout these grades. Instructional materials should emphasize which

tasks double as instructional and progress assessment tasks, along with guidelines to assist teachers as they make data-based decisions. Because of the added complexities of the complete reading and language arts curriculum and the number of students assigned to each teacher at these grade levels, teachers should develop systems to organize records of student performance data, including test scores, and analyze regularly the progress each student is making toward achieving mastery of the grade-level standards.

### Summative Assessment

Each summative assessment at this level should assess several standards. The semester course tests that teachers give in English classes should be aligned to reflect how well students are meeting the expectations of end-of-year mastery of grade-level standards. As with the previous grade levels, STAR program assessments are administered to students in grades nine through eleven. Students first take the *California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)* in grade ten. If they do not pass the *CAHSEE* as tenth graders are given additional opportunities to take the *CAHSEE*. Teachers in grades nine through twelve should routinely assess students' proficiency in all the writing applications appropriate for each grade level—a process similar to that used in grades four through eight.

Assessments of specific skills, such as oral reading fluency, are less frequent in the high school years except for assessments of students who read and write significantly below grade level (two grade levels or more below a student's current grade level) or are at risk of not passing the *CAHSEE* and for whom a plan of intervention has been

established. Schoolwide writing assessments, commonly conducted in these grades once a year, are a source of information on student achievement not typically available elsewhere. Most important, teachers in grades nine through twelve determine mastery of content standards by assessing the students' increasingly sophisticated language arts skills and knowledge through an examination of their reading and writing skills and strategies in the context of literature and informational text.

### **Similarities of Assessments Across Grade Levels**

All three types of assessments used to inform instruction share some critical characteristics across grade levels:

#### **Entry-Level Assessment**

The exact purpose of each assessment should be clear: Do the students have the prerequisite skills needed? Do they already know the planned content? To what extent do they know the content? The results of entry-level assessments help guide the teacher in setting the course of initial instruction and determining modifications for specific students or groups of students.

#### **Monitoring of Progress**

The most critical guideline for the monitoring of progress is that it should occur at frequent intervals and that the assessment data should be used quickly to respond to student learning and adjust instruction. Each subtest should have established or agreed-on cutoff scores to indicate what score equates to mastery (e.g., a score of eight out of 10 items indicates mastery). Collecting and acting on information frequently

during instruction is a sign of a highly effective program (Allinder, Fuchs, and Fuchs 2004). In an effort to ensure the progress of every student, the data should be examined at individual student and classroom levels. Because the monitoring of progress is a collaborative, professional activity, the data should be shared among teachers at the same grade level and should be analyzed to identify student needs and determine what strategies are working most effectively.

Everything students do during instruction provides teachers with an opportunity for monitoring their progress. Informal classroom observations, instructional materials-embedded unit tests, and formal standardized assessments are some of the many tools available to teachers with which to measure student progress toward mastery of the English-language arts content standards. Effective teachers utilize different assessment tools to inform instruction and meet the instructional needs of individual students.

For classroom teachers and site administrators to be able to use the assessment information across classrooms by grade level, this type of assessment requires standardization. Features of standardized assessments include (1) the use of consistent procedures to administer the test; (2) uniform test form; (3) the use of consistent scoring procedures with agreed-on answer keys and interpretation guides (e.g., established cutoff scores for indicating mastery level); and (4) a procedure for the use of the information to determine instructional needs and appropriate interventions for each student.

It is virtually impossible to overstate the importance of using performance data as the basis for making well-informed adjustments to instruction. Teachers need a solid basis for answering such questions as the following:

- Should I move ahead? Should I spend more time on the current phase of instruction?
- Are students able to practice and apply what they have learned adequately through independent activities? Do I need to provide additional, specific instruction?
- Can I accelerate the planned instruction for some or all students, given that there is sufficient evidence of student mastery? If so, what is the best way to proceed?
- If students are not achieving mastery, what can I do differently to address instructional needs?

### Summative Assessment

The most critical aspect of all summative assessment is that it measures generalization and transference of skills and knowledge required for mastery of grade-level standards (Allinder, Fuchs, and Fuchs 2004). For example, if one summative evaluation in the early grades involves a test of decoding a list of words, some or all of those words should be new to students (words not previously used extensively in decoding tasks). If a summative assessment in later grades involves reading a passage and answering comprehension questions, students should not have read the measurement passages previously. If students are to write a critical review of a literary work in high school, they should analyze and evaluate a new reading selection. If a student has learned a skill sufficiently, he/she will apply the skill beyond the specific material/content used during instruction. Summative assessments aligned with the standards and the curriculum are not mere reflections of the retained knowledge, but

can be the most valid and reliable indicators of depth of understanding as demonstrated through generalization and transference.

### **Statewide Pupil Assessment System**

A major component of California's statewide testing system is the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program. For English-language arts, the STAR tests are the statewide system of summative assessment for grades two through eleven.

#### **Standardized Testing and Reporting Program**

The STAR Program consists of two types of standardized assessments: (1) criterion-referenced assessments that are aligned to the state-adopted English-language arts standards and were developed especially for California and (2) nationally normed assessments. Standards-aligned STAR tests in English-language arts are administered to all students in grades two through eleven. STAR tests in the subject areas of mathematics, science, and history-social science are administered in various grade levels as required by statute. In addition, the STAR Program includes tests written in Spanish for Spanish-speaking English learners and tests specifically designed for students with disabilities.



The State Board of Education has adopted performance levels to be used in reporting the results of the standards-aligned STAR assessments: advanced, proficient, basic, below basic, and far below basic. The state goal is that all students perform at the proficient level or above on the standards-aligned STAR assessments. Test results are disaggregated by subgroups and are reported to the public at the school, district, county, and state levels. Individual student scores are reported to parents and teachers.

## Other Statewide Assessments

### *California High School Exit Examination*

The primary purposes of the *California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)* are to improve student achievement and ensure that students graduate from high school with grade-level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. The *CAHSEE* has two parts: English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The ELA portion addresses state-adopted *English-Language Arts Content Standards* through grade ten. As part of the ELA portion, students are required to write, on demand, in response to a writing prompt.

Students first take the *CAHSEE* in the tenth grade. Students who do not pass the *CAHSEE* in the tenth grade are given additional opportunities to pass the test. Beginning with the class of 2006, students are required to pass the *CAHSEE* as one of the requirements of receiving a high school diploma.

## **California English Language Development Test**

The *California English Language Development Test (CELDT)* is an English language proficiency assessment. While the *STAR California Standards Tests in English-Language Arts* are aligned to the *English-Language Arts Content Standards*, the *CELDT* is based on the *English Language Development Standards*. The *CELDT* has three purposes: (1) to identify new students in kindergarten through grade 12 who are English learners; (2) to determine their level of English language proficiency; and (3) to annually assess the progress of English learners toward acquiring listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in English. Once a student is identified as fluent English proficient, the student no longer takes the *CELDT*.

## **Summary of the Chapter**

Each of the three distinct types of assessment described previously—entry-level assessment, monitoring of progress, and summative assessment—contributes substantially to informing effective instruction. In particular the monitoring of progress can play a key role in developing and delivering curricula and instruction that effectively lead to the achievement of the goals embedded in the standards (Allinder, Fuchs, and Fuchs 2004; Howell and Nolet 2000). This framework places substantial emphasis on integrating an assessment system with curriculum and instruction. Therefore, assessment and instruction must be interrelated in ways that maximize the potential for

- 334 assessment measures themselves to contribute to more effective instruction and
- 335 meaningful learning.